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3 (of 4)
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ALIENS
EARTH WAR
JOHN BOLTON 1990

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WITH THE SHIP'S GRAVITY DRIVE PROPELLING US AT HUNDREDS OF TIMES THE SPEED OF LIGHT, WE WERE ORBITING RIPLEY'S "DREAM" WITHIN A MATTER OF DAYS.
THE CLOSER WE CAME, THE MORE I FELT THE ALIEN'S *PRESENCE*--
--THE MORE I KNEW IT FELT *MINE*.
NEWT-- WE'RE ALMOST READY.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
TULLY--? GOD, I DON'T KNOW...
...I--I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT *EARTH*.
I NEVER REALLY CONSIDERED IT MY HOME. I FEEL I'VE BEEN ADRIFT ALL THESE YEARS, *SEARCHING*...
IT'S THE SAME FOR ALL OF US: ME, RIPLEY, HICKS--
--THE *ALIEN*.
IT'S FUNNY. WE SEE THEM AS *INTRUDERS* ON EARTH, TAKING SOMETHING PRECIOUS *AWAY* FROM US, BUT--
--MAYBE *WE'RE* THE INTRUDERS, TULLY.
MAYBE THEIR SEARCH IS OVER-- AND EARTH WAS *MEANT* TO BE THEIRS *ALL ALONG*.

WHOSE IDEA WERE THE SUITS?
RIPLEY'S. SHE CONVINCED CAPTAIN MCQUADE TO CANNIBALIZE THE PLATFORM'S POWER LOADERS AND MODIFY THEM FOR MILITARY DUTY.
SAYS SHE'S HAD EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SORT OF THING.
I GUESS SHE LIKES HAVING AN EDGE.
GOOD.
CRUNCH!
FUEL NOMINAL. ELECTRICALS UP-- MAKE SURE WE HAVE HARD COPY OFF THE DROP SHIP'S NAVIGATIONAL, JUST IN CASE.
CHRIST, BREW, HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THE MATRIX ON THE DROP SITE?
I'M PICKING UP ROCK FORMATIONS THAT MAKE MT. EVEREST LOOK LIKE A BAD DIVOT.
BREWSTER
HEY, IF IT WAS EASY, ANYBODY COULD DO IT.
BESIDES, TOPOGRAPHY'S THE A.P.C.'S PROBLEM. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS DROP THEM.
YEAH.
AND PICK UP WHATEVER THE HELL THEY FIND DOWN THERE.

I...
I'M SORRY, HONEY.

RIPLEY-- THEY'RE READY.
YEAH.
FINE. BE THERE IN A MINUTE.

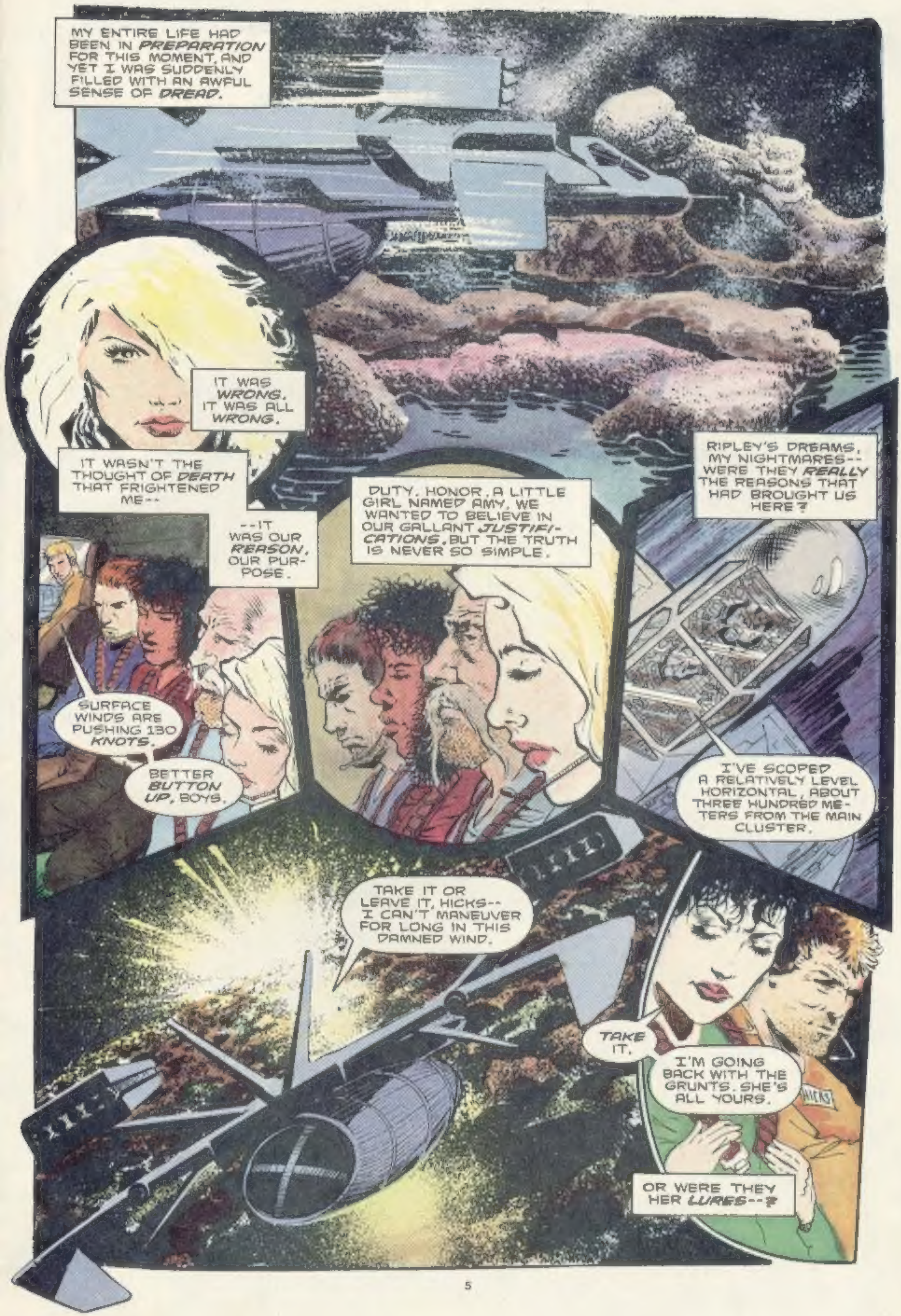
I, uh, HOPE THEY SECTORED THE A.P.C.'S COM-LINK. THOSE LOW-FREQUENCY JOBS TEND TO SCATTER AT THE FIRST SIGN OF--
JESUS.
RIPLEY, IS THIS A PICTURE OF YOUR--?

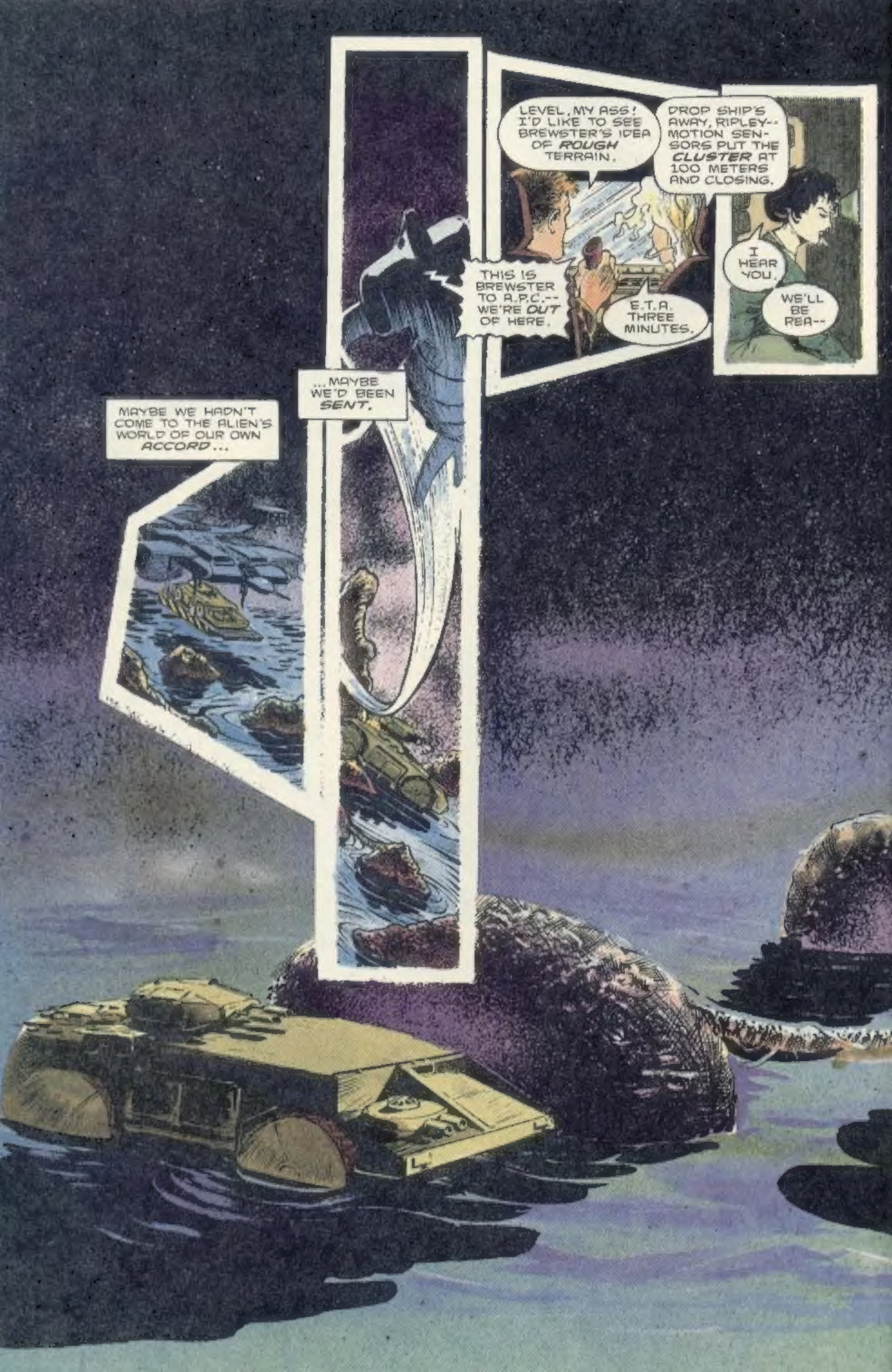
MY DAUGHTER. IT WAS TAKEN A COUPLE OF WEEKS BEFORE I REPORTED ABOARD THE NOSTROMO.
SHE-- SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL.
YEAH. THE PSYCHS WERE CONCERNED WHEN I DIDN'T SHOW AN "OVERT EMOTIONAL RESPONSE" TO HER DEATH-- BUT WHY SHOULD I? THE OLD WOMAN IN THEIR FILES WAS A STRANGER TO ME.

I SPENT HER WHOLE LIFE DRIFTING THROUGH EMPTY SPACE--LOST IN YEARS OF PERFECT HIBERNATION, WHILE SHE GREW OLD AND DIED.
THE ALIEN STOLE THE TIME WE SHOULD HAVE HAD TOGETHER.
SOMETIMES I THINK THOSE THINGS HAVE AS MUCH RIGHT TO SURVIVE AS ANY OF US. SOMETIMES I WONDER WHAT GIVES US THE ARROGANCE TO CHALLENGE THEIR EXISTENCE.

THEN I LOOK AT MY LITTLE GIRL.
AND I KNOW.

GLAD YOU COULD STOP BY, RIPLEY-- ESPECIALLY SINCE THIS IS *YOUR* PARTY.
BREWSTER'S PICKED UP A CLUSTER OF MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. VERY ERRATIC-- MIGHT EVEN BE SEISMIC.
PROPER PROCEDURE WOULD BE TO DROP A ROBOT *PROBE*--BUT I DON'T SEE ANY POINT BOTHERING WITH COUNT-DOWNS AND TRIPLE-REDUNDANT *CROSS-CHECKS*.
CLICK!
WE'RE EITHER READY-- OR WE DIE...
"...LET'S NOT KEEP THEM *WAITING*."


MY ENTIRE LIFE HAD BEEN IN *PREPARATION* FOR THIS MOMENT, AND YET I WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH AN AWFUL SENSE OF *DREAD*.
IT WAS *WRONG*. IT WAS ALL *WRONG*.
IT WASN'T THE THOUGHT OF *DEATH* THAT FRIGHTENED ME--
--IT WAS OUR *REASON*, OUR PURPOSE.
DUTY, HONOR, A LITTLE GIRL NAMED AMY. WE WANTED TO BELIEVE IN OUR GALLANT *JUSTIFICATIONS*. BUT THE TRUTH IS NEVER SO SIMPLE.
RIPLEY'S DREAMS, MY NIGHTMARES-- WERE THEY *REALLY* THE REASONS THAT HAD BROUGHT US HERE?
SURFACE WINDS ARE PUSHING 130 *KNOTS*.
BETTER *BUTTON UP*, BOYS.
I'VE SCOPED A RELATIVELY LEVEL HORIZONTAL, ABOUT THREE HUNDRED METERS FROM THE MAIN CLUSTER.
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT, HICKS-- I CAN'T MANEUVER FOR LONG IN THIS DAMNED WIND.
TAKE IT.
I'M GOING BACK WITH THE GRUNTS. SHE'S ALL YOURS.
OR WERE THEY HER *LURES*--?


THIS IS BREWSTER TO A.P.C.-- WE'RE *OUT* OF HERE.
LEVEL, MY ASS! I'D LIKE TO SEE BREWSTER'S IDEA OF *ROUGH* TERRAIN.
E.T.A. THREE MINUTES.
DROP SHIP'S AWAY, RIPLEY-- MOTION SENSORS PUT THE *CLUSTER* AT 100 METERS AND CLOSING.
I HEAR YOU.
WE'LL BE REA--
...MAYBE WE'D BEEN *SENT*.
MAYBE WE HADN'T COME TO THE ALIEN'S WORLD OF OUR OWN *ACCORD*...

CHUNG!
WE... WE LOST ONE OF THE AFT STRUTS, BUT OTHERWISE DAMAGE SEEMS MINIMAL--
--WHAT THE HELL DID WE HIT?
I-- I'M NOT SURE. SOME KIND OF MOISTURE. TREADS LIFTED AND WE LOST TRACTION.
WHAT IS THAT STUFF?
OH, MY GOD--
--IT'S REAL.

I DON'T REMEMBER VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS DETAIL. DO YOU REMEMBER ME VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS DETAIL?
WHO GIVES A SHIT?
"JUST BE CAREFUL OUT THERE."
WE'VE COME TOO FAR TO LOSE IT ALL NOW.
HELL, TULLY, THOSE THINGS AREN'T INTERESTED IN AN UGLY OLD BASTARD LIKE ME--
--THEY LIKE 'EM YOUNG.
ATMOSPHERE'S LOW ON OXYGEN AND HIGH ON CONTAMINATES-- BREATHABLE, BUT JUST BARELY. USE THE ONBOARD MASKS WHEN YOU CAN.
WE DON'T WANT ANY DEAD HEROES. NEWT'S MONITORING THE CLUSTER RELATIVE TO YOUR POSITION, SO LISTEN UP--
--AND STAY AWAKE!
FALK
CARVEY
DUTTON
HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE READINGS LOOK LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A HYPERTENSIVE'S HOW-TO MANUAL...
...THEY MAY DO A LOT OF THINGS, BUT SLEEPING WON'T BE ONE OF THEM.

THIS...JELLY... ISN'T RELATED TO ANY SURFACE ANOMALY. IT SEEMS TO BE EMANATING FROM THE FORMATION'S
WHAT ARE THESE THINGS? THEY'RE TOO LARGE TO BE ALIEN EGG SACS
WHATEVER THE HELL, IT'S DEFINITELY ORGANIC--AND IT'S OOZING THAT TRANS-LUCENT DISCHARGE LIKE A SON OF A BITCH!
I CAN-- I CAN ALMOST SEE INSIDE...
OH GOD-- I'M PICKING UP MOVEMENT FROM THE FIVE EXTERNAL CLUSTERS.
HICKS-- IT'S COMING FROM THOSE PODS!
FALK! GET OUT OF THERE-- NOW!
THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE--
WHA--?

AGHHHH--!

FALK! JESUS, SOMEONE HELP ME--!

GET IT OFF ME-- GET IT-- AHH-- AHGGG --!

GAAAAAAA

CARVEY!

THOSE POWER LOADERS ARE BUILT OUT OF ALLOYED STEEL, AND THEY'RE TEARING THEM APART LIKE TISSUE PAPER!

THE GODDAMN THINGS MUST HAVE EVOLVED--

--THE QUESTION IS: HOW MUCH?

WELL I THINK WE FOUND THEM
WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE APC IF THEY--
DUNSTON!
AHHHH..
YOU SON OF A--!
DIE!
DIE, GODDAMN IT!
DI--

GAAAHH-- UK!

KISS THIS, BOYO!

BRRRIIPP!

I'M GETTING MOTION SENSOR READINGS FROM ALL THE EXTERNAL PODS--MUST BE MORE OF THE *THINGS* THAT ATTACKED CARVEY

FALK CARVEY CAPR

HELL--MAYBE WE *SHOULD* HAVE SENT IN THAT PROBE

RAISE BREWSTER IN THE DROP SHIP--TELL HIM WE'RE LOOKING AT AN EMERGENCY DUST-OFF, LIKE *NOW*.

READ YOU, A.P.C., BUT NO WAY CAN WE PUT DOWN AT YOUR CURRENT POSITION

ROLL BACK TO THE INITIAL DROP POINT AND WE'LL PICK YOU UP GENTLE AS A KITTEN

RIPLEY--WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOU *HEARD* HICKS--WE'RE GOING TO GRAB FALK AND BURN THE HELL *OUT* OF HERE!

I *KNOW* SHE'S *THERE*.

I DIDN'T COME THIS FAR JUST TO LET HER SLIP *AWAY*.

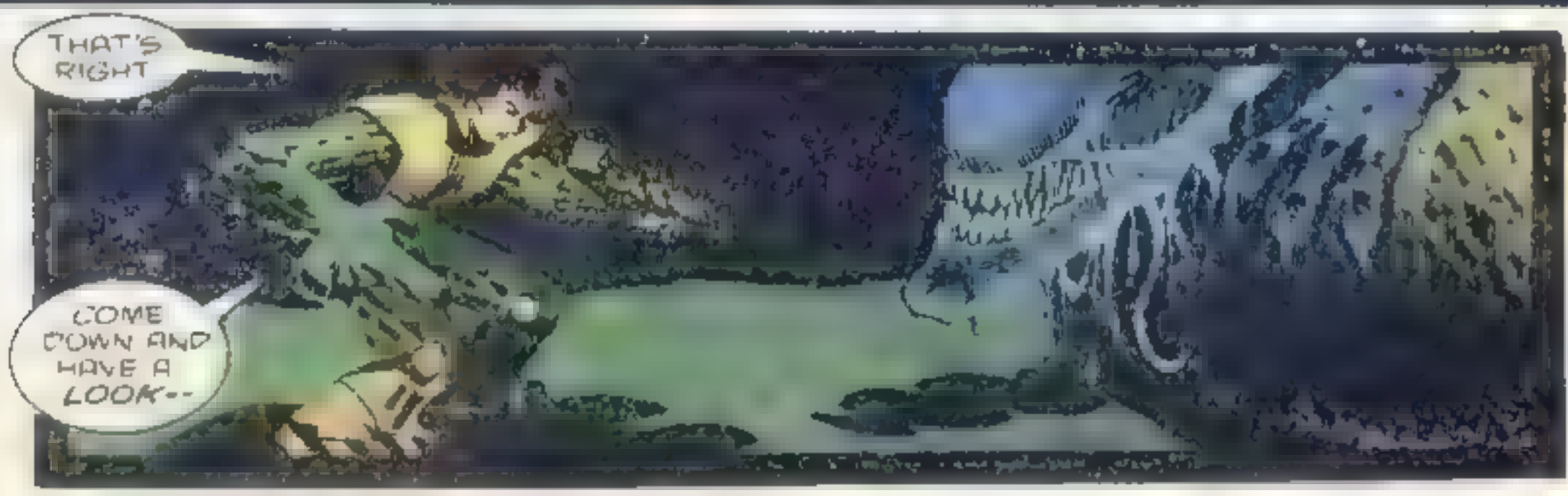
THANKS FOR THE SHOWER!
ALL RIGHT ALL RIGHT. I'M HERE--
--DON'T MAKE ME KNOCK, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!
I'LL TOSS YOU A TOWEL ONCE WE'RE BACK IN ORBIT.
WRUNCH!
JESUS--!
WHAT IN HELL WERE THOSE THINGS? THEY'RE FASTER AND STRONGER THAN ANYTHING WE FOUND ON EARTH--
--AND I THOUGHT THEY WERE PRETTY ROUGH.
THEY'RE HER CHOSEN FEW--
BRRRRIPP!

"--THEY'RE TRYING TO PROTECT HER"
WHUMP
WHAT TH--?
SOMETHING'S OPENED OUR REACTOR'S INTERNAL COOLING SYSTEM--CORE TEMPERATURE'S RISING BY THE SECOND!
YEAH, AND MANUAL CONTROL'S FOR SHIT--
--LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT VISITORS ON THE HULL.
RIPLEY--WE'RE NEVER GOING TO MAKE IT TO THE DROP SITE.
THIS IS YOUR SHOW--ANY IDEAS?
YEAH. GIVE ME FIVE MINUTES OF COVER TO GET INTO THE THING'S NEST--
--AND WE'LL FINISH IT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
RIGHT, JUST PULL OVER AND "DROP YOU OFF."
THOSE BASTARDS WILL BE ALL OVER US IN A SECOND--!
YOU--YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL--HOW MUCH YOU AND NEWT MEAN TO ME..
SO WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT STOPPING? AS SOON AS I'M OUT, SEAL THE HATCH.
HEY, SCREW IT, RIPLEY--
--SAVE IT FOR WHEN YOU GET BACK.

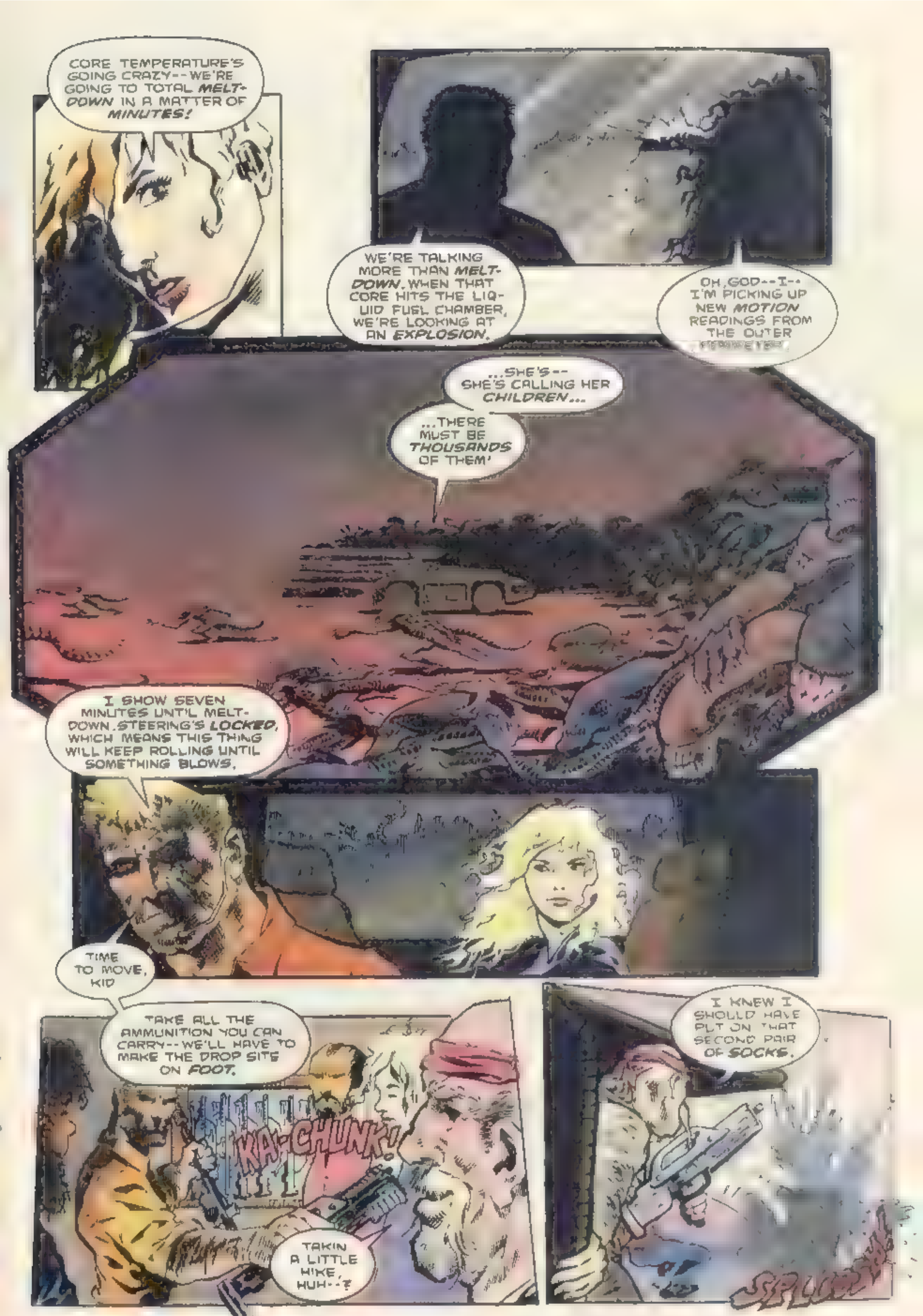
UMPPHH!
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW--
--THE WAY IT'S ALWAYS BEEN
"I'M SHOWING SEVERAL LIFE FORMS MOVING AT HIGH SPEED TOWARD THE A.P.C.--"
-I GUESS THAT MEANS RIPLEY'S PLAN IS WORKING.
REACTOR HALFWAY TO CRITICAL, A.P.C. SWARMING WITH THOSE GODDAMN THINGS...
...IF HER PLAN WAS WORKING ANY BETTER, WE COULD BLOW OUR BRAINS OUT NOW AND SAVE THOSE BASTARDS THE TROU--
JESUS--!
KKSSSHH!!
PLOOM!
'COURSE, IT COULD BE WORSE.

WE COULD BE OUT THERE-- WITH RIPLEY."
I WONDER HOW LONG THEY'VE BEEN WAITING...
...HOW LONG THEY'VE ACHED FOR RELEASE..
GOD--I CAN FEEL YOU ALL AROUND ME ...
WHACK!
...WHY DON'T YOU SHOW YOUR SELF--?
EXPLAIN YOUR WORTHLESS EXISTENCE-- WHAT YOU DID TO THE CREW OF THE NOSTROMO, THE SOLDIERS FROM THE SULACO...
CHAK!
...EXPLAIN EARTH...
...EXPLAIN NEWT...

EXPLAIN MY DAUGHTER!



WHACK
--YOU BITCH!
DROP SHIP, THIS IS RIPLEY.
ZERO MY POSITION AND PREPARE TO EFFECT PICK-UP.
I TOLD HICKS AND I'LL TELL YOU--THERE'S NO PLACE TO LAND--!
WE CAN'T EFFECT SHIT--
SO DON'T PUT DOWN--BUT GET THAT SHIP OVER MY COORDI-NATES, NOW!


CORE TEMPERATURE'S GOING CRAZY--WE'RE GOING TO TOTAL MELT-DOWN IN A MATTER OF MINUTES!
WE'RE TALKING MORE THAN MELT-DOWN. WHEN THAT CORE HITS THE LIQUID FUEL CHAMBER, WE'RE LOOKING AT AN EXPLOSION.
OH, GOD--I--I'M PICKING UP NEW MOTION READINGS FROM THE OUTER PERIMETER.
...SHE'S--SHE'S CALLING HER CHILDREN...
...THERE MUST BE THOUSANDS OF THEM!
I SHOW SEVEN MINUTES UNTIL MELT-DOWN. STEERING'S LOCKED, WHICH MEANS THIS THING WILL KEEP ROLLING UNTIL SOMETHING BLOWS.
TIME TO MOVE, KID
TAKE ALL THE AMMUNITION YOU CAN CARRY--WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE THE DROP SITE ON FOOT.
KA-CHUNK!
TAKIN A LITTLE HIKE, HUH--?
I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE PUT ON THAT SECOND PAIR OF SOCKS.

EVERYBODY STAY TOGETHER
CONSERVE YOUR AMMUNITION-- FIRE AT SPECIFIC TARGETS
SON OF A--!
BRRRRIPPP!
YOU MEAN LIKE THIS--?
THEY'RE ALL AROUND US
IT'S OVER, HICKS-- YOU KNOW THAT WE'LL NEVER MAKE THE DROP SITE!
FIVE MORE MINUTES AND THE APC WILL DETONATE THEN--GUESS WHAT...
NEITHER WILL THEY!

RIPLEY, THIS IS BREWSTER. I'LL BRING HER IN AS LOW AS WE CAN AND-
JESUS-- WHAT IN HELL IS THAT?
CHUNK!
OPEN THE CONTAINMENT CHAMBER!
JUST A LITTLE LOWER. COME ON, COME ON!
ALL RIGHT- UP NOW!
YEAH THAT'S RIGHT, BITCH -
-- WE'RE GOING FOR A LITTLE RIDE.

GET READY TO CLOSE...
.. ON MY ORDER...
EMERGENCY RETRACT
AGHHHH--!
NOW! SEAL IT!
CHUNK!
HOW'S IT FEEL, YOU SHIT--?

YOU'RE MINE NOW.
HURRY UP-- BREWSTER WANTS US ON THE BRIDGE.
WE'RE GETTING THE HELL OUT OF HERE.
THE A.P.C.'S GONE CRITICAL-- CORE DETONATION IN LESS THAN TWO MINUTES
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHAT ABOUT NEWT AND THE OTHERS--?
THE SQUAD'S PINNED DOWN IN ONE OF THE NARROW VALLEYS--BREWSTER SAYS IT'S TOO TIGHT FOR A PICKUP.
RIPLEY...
LOOK, THERE'S JUST NO WAY WE CAN PUT DOWN. THERE'S NO GODDAMN ROOM-- AND THERE'S NO TIME!
FIND A WAY.
AND MAKE IT QUICK.

LESS THAN 100 ROUNDS LEFT, HICKS--
--AND I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO A TOE-TO-TOE WITH THESE THINGS
I DON'T THINK ANY OF US ARE MAYBE IT'S TIME TO CONSIDER OUR ONLY..
OPTION
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
ERRR-CRUNCH
THIRTY SECONDS TO MELT-DOWN.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
I THOUGHT THAT BASTARD COULDN'T LAND HERE--!

I CONVINCED HIM TO RE-CONSIDER.

DETONATION IN FIVE SECONDS BRACE YOURSELVES

" YOU RE WITH ME NOW "
Next issue: MORE ACTION THAN CAN BE HUMANLY IMAGINED!

BUG HUNT

c/o Dark Horse Comics
2008 S.E. Monroe St.
Milwaukie, OR 97222

Dear Dark Horse:

When I read the first *Aliens* series I was awestruck by Mark Nelson's artwork. I never thought that black-and-white could be used to create the atmosphere that was an integral part of *Alien* and *Aliens*. Of course, I was dead wrong. The art, along with Mark Verheiden's brilliant writing, created a comic that was every bit as good as the movies, and surpassed every comic book ever printed.

Then came the second series. Denis Beauvais' use of airbrushing was absolutely extraordinary. From the cover of the first issue to the final page of the fourth issue with Ripley and her Alien-bashing gear, his artwork captured the eerie images of the Aliens and the darkness that was so prevalent in the films. I've never seen such a lifelike comic. At this point, I was almost keeping myself awake at night waiting for the first issue of the *Earth War* series.

When I walked into the comic shop and saw the cover staring at me, I had to rub my eyes to make sure that it was actually a drawing and not a photograph. It was outstanding. I couldn't wait to get home to read the book and study the artwork. Much to my dismay, I found the artwork inside absolutely pathetic. Newt, Ripley, and the Marines looked like twisted caricatures from *Mad* magazine. Every feature of the people, the Aliens, and the surroundings was so ridiculously exaggerated that it was impossible to see these images actually happening in real life. The only mood that Kieth created was the bad one that I was in after I read the first issue. I couldn't feel the tension and the mystery that I felt in the first two series. I also discovered that good writing without good art to complement it makes the writing seem worse. For this reason, I didn't really care much for the story line because the art was so bad. This is not meant to criticize Mr. Verheiden, because I am sure that his writing was just as impeccable as it always is; I just couldn't appreciate it because of Kieth's art.

I most certainly hope that Sam Kieth wakes up and realizes that he is drawing for Dark Horse and not *Mad* magazine. I and your other readers expect such great things from Dark Horse comics, and I'd hate to think that this is a new trend that is being set. All I can say is that I hope this series goes by quickly so that you will get a good artist like Nelson or Beauvais for the fourth series — if there is going to be one.

Jay Hoover
Vancouver, WA

Welcome to the Sam Kieth controversy, readers! Jay, you're not alone in thinking Sam's art isn't suitable for Aliens, *though there are plenty of readers who disagree with you. Right now letters are running fifty-fifty for and against. One thing's for certain: when it comes to Sam, you guys either love his work or hate it! Reactions are extreme on either side of the coin, but so far nobody's come down in the middle.*

Dear Dark Horse,

When I saw the first issue of *Aliens: Earth War* on the shelf, I could not wait to buy it and read it. After finishing the issue, though, I was very disappointed. The story was just as good as the two *Aliens* series before, but the art was awful.

The colors in the *Earth War* series are too bright. I feel like I am in a room on a sunny day with all of the windows open. I think that dark colors are needed to set a scary mood in *Aliens*. The Alien on page 2 looks too human to be an *Alien*.

Onto Ripley and the Marines: Ripley looks like a blimp instead of the slim fighter she appeared as on the last page of the second series. How much hairspray did she use to get her hair to look like that? The Marines on page 20 are stuck in a Ghostbuster stance. Their appearance makes me want to laugh so much that I do not even care if they live.

The reason that I am so upset is that I will probably waste $2.50 on this comic book, because I enjoy the story. I feel that a good story should also come with good art.

Sincerely,
Gregory Milken
(no address on letter)

Don't be a dope, Greg: if you feel you're "wasting" $2.50 on this book, then stop buying it!

Sales are an important indicator of consumer tastes, and if you continue to support something you don't believe in, publishers will continue to give it to you. By now, though, I hope you feel you're getting a little more for your money. Because Sam didn't leave much room for color in his work, Monika tried to compensate with brighter colors than we're used to seeing in the Aliens *books, but she's been toning down with every issue. Let us know how you feel about the color work in this one, Greg.*

Dear Lady Di,

Aliens: Earth War #1. Hmm, another licensed series from Dark Horse. It seems most of your output is spinoff product. It could be argued that this stifles original creations from seeing print; your schedule is too glutted with corporation-owned properties, and the creative people are too busy securely pumping out work for others to find time and take the risk to do work on their own brainchildren.

Bull! Dark Horse has been one of the most courageous companies around in taking chances on creators' concepts and how they want them produced. For example: Frank Miller's two projects, *Dark Horse Presents*, and Paul Chadwick's when-I-get-it-done *Concrete*.

And what's wrong with licensed work? I enjoyed the *Conan* comics for all the years Roy Thomas was involved, and a few afterwards, and I love DC's *Star Trek* comics. As long as writers and artists are faithful to the spirit of the source material and are given wide latitude to do what they want, who cares? The only important thing about a comic is: is it good and entertaining? So far, all of Dark Horse's are.

Okay, enough of this schizophrenic debating, on to my opinions of the issue in hand. Mark's writing: excellent, as usual! The slight change in style was nice. The "new" personality — Ripley — narrating gave the story a different feel: a warmth and a sense of deep caring, even though the tale was harsh. And I liked that this issue looked more like a normal comic — not so heavy with captions, like the previous two, and lots of word balloons — a refreshing change of pace.

Sam's art was...interesting. It was very well executed and I'm a fan of his work, but I must admit a little disappointment that he didn't play it straight, as the previous artists did, and as he's quite capable of doing. It wasn't his unrecognizable likeness of Ripley that bothered me — you probably don't have the right to use Sigourney Weaver's face *[We don't.]*. Rather, it was the cartoony appearance of the Marines; they looked out of place in this grim, gritty story. I did like Sam's tribute to EC-era Frank Frazetta art on the scenes between Ripley and Hankerson, though.

A couple of other things I liked: the title and cover. It's wise that you're subtitling these series now; "*Earth War*" sounds better than "volume 3." John Bolton's painted cover was very striking...and fascinating in its contrasting elements. John's Alien is meticulously faithful to Giger's futuristic, bio-techno style, but the texture of the painting is as unto an 18th century's. This is becoming John's trademark, producing some interesting works.

Well, that's enough of my banter. Good work! "See" you next issue.

Thoughts, through typewriter, via mail, by...

Scott Tilson
Streetsville, Ontario
Canada

Thanks for championing the fact that good licensed work is as valid as good creator-owned work, Scott. A sad fact of our current market-place is that it doesn't support a lot of creator-owned material, even when it's outstandingly good, but many writers and artists gain popular acclaim by giving their best on recognizable properties such as Aliens *— and this acclaim often translates back into wider sales on said writers' or artists'* own *projects. In any event, I should point out that in its five-year history, Dark Horse has published somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 issues, only 30 or so of which have featured licensed characters — hardly a "glut" under anyone's interpretation, it seems to me.*

By the way, Scott, that wasn't Ripley narrating, it was Newt. And though you kinda goofed on that score — or maybe we goofed, if it wasn't clear to you — ten points to you and our next correspondent for noticing Sam's artistic tribute to EC science fiction comics of the '50s.

Dear Diana,

Re *Aliens: Earth War* #1:

A good, solid beginning. It reads (and looks) like a good sci-fi comic from the fifties. The EC kind, you know? This, I think, is the absolute best of the *Aliens* trilogy (I think this is what it is, isn't it?) to this point. The *pièce de résistance*? The cover by John Bolton. So exquisite, so haunting, so perfect. The whole book is worth a 10.

I'll offer a comment or three on *Aliens vs. Predator* while I'm here. First off, I'd have to say the book would look better in black and white. There is no real conflict between the two species at the start, and it's clear the Earthlings involved will get caught in the middle. As it is, this has the feel of those old Japanese sci-fi films from several years back, like the *Godzilla* film series. Basically, as a whole, the jury is still

out. I'll pass on AvsP #0, since I have the DHP issues already in hand. Why have a reprint when you have the original material already?

See you in sixty.

Jacob Gilbert
Troy, NY

Jacob, the decision to publish Aliens vs. Predator *#0 was made in order to supply readers with the AvsP prequel all under one cover, instead of in three separate segments, as published in DHP #34-36. Also, any readers who didn't originally pick up the issues of* Dark Horse Presents *featuring* Aliens vs. Predator *or who were already being forced to pay high back-issue prices for those issues were the ones intended to benefit from the reprint.*

Dear Dark Horse,

I bought the first color *Aliens* series and loved it. It was probably *the* best story line and *by far* the best artwork I have ever seen anywhere. Congrats to Denis Beauvais. The series ended well and we even got Ripley back, although I don't think that's terribly important considering the great characterization you've done with Newt and Hicks.

My question is this: What happened to the fantastic artwork of the second series? I eagerly awaited the arrival of issue #1 of the *Earth War* series, and was once again well impressed with the cover art and the story, but the characters were almost unrecognizable. The book was way too bright and looked almost cheery. What happened to you bozos anyway?

Sincerely yours,
Kevin Pearle
Hants County, Nova Scotia
Canada

Hey, man, on this bus we're all...*nah, never mind — that's probably before your time!*

Dear Dark Horse,

Let me begin by saying that I wouldn't be surprised if in a short time Dark Horse were as big as the two giants. Certainly, in some titles you have exceeded them already. One thing is for sure, whoever came up with the name "Dark Horse" hit the nail on the head.

First of all, the original *Aliens* series was fantastic. Both the story and art were some of the best I've ever seen. Then I was shocked to see you top yourselves in the second *Aliens* (it's my favorite series in a collection of about 2000 comics). The airbrush art of Denis Beauvais is beyond my explanation (I would have collected the series for the covers alone). Plus, the story was less jumpy and easier to follow. Now, though, you've done it a third time. All I can say is "Congratulations."

Furthermore, the *Predator* series was excellent, and now the *Aliens vs. Predator* story is the best. Then I see the upcoming *Terminator* series, which I'm sure will be just as good. With titles and talent like that on your side, Dark Horse will be rising fast! Best of all, you always go the extra mile. For example, the "behind the scenes" in *Aliens*, *Predator*, and *The Abyss* really add a nice touch.

I only have one request: Please don't make any of the titles unlimited series. Your current approach is the best. A series of limited series allows you enough time to get the books done properly and keep up the level of quality. Also, it's a nice transition for new artists. And I love the fact that the series aren't truly independent; they connect beautifully.

Probably the most important point I want to make is: maintain the current quality of your comics and you can't go wrong. Oh, one more thing: Don't answer too many questions ("What do Aliens eat?" etc.), at least not too quickly. The mysteriousness of these titles adds a lot to them.

Thanks a lot.

Sincerely,
Gregory Abbott
Los Angeles, CA

And thanks for your nice comments, Gregory — I needed them after that last "bozo" remark! It was Dark Horse head honcho Mike Richardson, by the way, who came up with the company name, and, as those of us who work for him well know, Mikey is always on the mark!

Dear Dark Horse,

I have been an avid reader of the *Aliens* comic series from the beginning. Mark Nelson's art in the first series is great. Denis Beauvais' art made *Aliens* volume 2 the best comic series in existence. The story is topnotch (thanks to Mark Verheiden), and the amazing quality of the art and overall comic...it can't be put into words how great I think it is! Naturally, I couldn't wait to open up *Aliens: Earth War*. When I did, however, I was extremely disappointed. I was so used to the perfect art from the first two series that when I saw Sam Kieth's drawings I was crestfallen. It isn't that Sam Kieth's art is bad, it's just that it's terrible for the *Aliens* series. His elongated heads, big lips, etc. just don't fit into the category of art *Aliens* readers have come to expect. If it weren't for Mark's great writing (so that I have to know what happens), I would not buy any more of the *Earth War* series. Luckily, you said that Mark Nelson will be back for the next series, otherwise I would seriously think

about not buying *Aliens* anymore. It is unfortunate that a so far perfect comic series has to be marred by this unsuitable art.

I was also wondering: Why did you switch Newt's hair color back to blonde? Are you trying to confuse us? Also, will you ever be using Denis Beauvais again for another *Aliens* series? I really hope so, and I'm sure I'm not the only Aliens fan who does.

I hope in the future you will only use great artists such as Mark Nelson and Denis Beauvais.

A loyal Aliens follower,
Adam Francis
Wayne, PA

I didn't say Mark Nelson would be back for the next *series, Adam — only for another* Aliens *series, as yet unscheduled. Stay tuned next issue for an announcement about the creative team for the all-new, all-exciting fourth* Aliens *series!*

And as to Newt's hair color, well, it's a woman's prerogative to change her mind — and *her hair color. Besides, don't you know blondes have more fun?! I sure do!*

Dear Diana,

I read the Dark Horse *Aliens* series and it was great. I read the second series and it was even better. Now I've seen issue #1 of the third series and, at the risk of sounding like a total fanboy, I've got to say that this one looks like being the best yet! The nagging thought in back of my mind that eventually Dark Horse would screw up and come out with a dud *Aliens* book is gone. Without a trace. And I'm ashamed it was ever there.

Aliens: Earth War issue #1 was exceptional in both script and art. Mark Verheiden has nothing left to prove, of course, but he is still improving his storytelling techniques. He managed to introduce a new cast and bring everyone up to date on the story so far and set up an exciting new scenario, all in one eminently readable issue. The return of Ripley was doubly satisfying — not only because this character *belongs* in any *Aliens* story, but also because Mark gave us a credible reason for her absence from the previous series.

Sam Kieth. What can I say about this guy that won't sound like gushing, mindless praise? On second thought, everyone's got to have a little gush now and then, right? The visuals in this issue were dynamite! Words like "raw," "vivid," and "fluid" come to mind, and they all apply. You mentioned "moody atmospherics," and yes, this is also true. Perhaps if I said that an unholy union of Berni Wrightson and Mark Schultz made this a visual treat, you'll get a glimmer of how I feel? I'm looking forward to issue #2 (he said, somewhat needlessly).

Best,
Dale Coe
Cheshire, England

P.S. A belated welcome back to comics, Diana. It's nice to see your name back on good comics again.

Thanks, Dale — though I never actually took a break from comics; it did seem that way, mind you, due to that curious publishing bug, "lag time," coupled with Comico's suspension of publication and the subsequent hiatus on the production of Grendel.

Dear Dark Horse,

What happened?

Aliens: Earth War issue #1. The cover was the best yet; page 1, nice; page 2, better; the rest, the worst.

Once again, a good story from Mr. Verheiden. Unfortunately, the art seems to have lost everything: claustrophobic feel, menace, and depth of character.

Page 5, panel 2, Ripley looks hardly human. The Marines' uniforms don't exist; in the other series they wore body armor and fatigues (sensible), yet this unit goes into a known hostile environment wearing pinstripe shirts, bib and braces, and jeans.

Also, how does a blond Marine with a crew cut suddenly, on the last page, go bald — with long hair? (That doesn't sound right.) Definitely an artist's impression of Hulk Hogan.

Undoubtedly Sam Kieth is a good artist, but his style just doesn't fit on this series.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Scott
Tyne & Wear, England

P.S. Liked the Hankerson (colonial Marine Captain and his alter ego as DH Director of Operations) tie-in.

Andrew, you may want to go back and reread that issue: most of the story takes place in flashback, which accounts for Falk having "suddenly" aged at the end of the book.

Dear Diana —

Will John Bolton be contributing all four of the *Aliens: Earth War* covers, or just this first one?

Seeya at Munden's.

Uncle Elvis
Clarksville, TN

All four, Elvis honey. And make mine White Zinfandel!

— "Hurricane" Schutz